



Return to Customer Food Allergy Safety

By Shandee Chernow

I'm someone who personally suffers from severe food allergies and as a result, created a product and technology platform to provide a solution to the restaurant industry, ultimately making dining experiences safer for those who also suffer from food allergies. I have always been a firm believer that it makes so much financial sense for the restaurant industry as a whole to strive to be the absolute best at handling food allergic guests that frequent their restaurants for a handful of reasons. I've noticed often times though, there seems to be a false perception industry-wide that the restaurants are already doing the best to keep their guests safe or that trying to improve any current systems or strategies to make customer service and safety any better is deemed "too difficult," that too many food allergies could be perceived as "figments of a particular guests' imagination" or that allergic people just should not go out to eat at all and should eat at home to avoid any reactions. Worse, there is often a perception that the restaurants not caring doesn't matter. From my seat, that approach and attitude is candidly the worse for a restaurant's bank account as the legal ramifications of not making food allergy safety a top priority could leave restaurants in a far worse situation than what they could ever have imagined. That's exactly why I created CertiStar - an easy, effective and affordable platform to literally take all the confusion away for the staff, servers and restaurant owners and make the guest ordering process easy, streamlined and provides complete peace of mind for both the venue and the guest. This ultimately creates an extremely positive financial impact for the restaurant as the food allergic guest now feels happy, comfortable, safe and is continuously frequenting a restaurant that they have trust in, they know has their back and created the safest possible experience for them to keep coming back to time and time again.

Food allergic customers affect both sides of the financial bottom line for a restaurant. These customers

can help you make significantly more revenue by handling them with the utmost safety and care, which can also help you avoid significant risk.

First, let's do some simple math to talk about the overarching missed opportunity as I see it because customers don't feel safe, welcome or both in many restaurants. Approximately 10% of the US population suffers from food allergies, and around 62% of people live in a household with a food allergic person. Also, 25% of people who have food allergies never go out to eat. With 325M people in the United States, that's more than 8M people who are not spending money on food & beverage but should be.

Also, food allergy guests are extremely loyal and vocal when they find a place that keeps them safe and makes them feel like any other guest and will likely continuously come back, time and time again to eat at your location. When a venue makes them feel safe and actually does the work to keep them safe, they become true and loyal brand ambassadors. Those customers not only frequent the establishment, they tip incredibly well, bring friends and family in and they share their positive experiences with the food allergy community platforms, on social media and more.

It's typical that food allergy guests often struggle to find one or two options at a restaurant with which they feel comfortable. The reason being that is that it can be a hard thing to navigate and figure out, especially during a busy time for the restaurant or server, when it's more difficult for the staff to find out all the things exactly the guest should be avoiding completely. It's even harder for the server and the guest to directly figure out a complete list of options that could be potentially consumed. This limited approach means that the food allergy guest ends up frequently ordering only one course or one simple dish, instead of getting to experience a more vast variety of menu options. By using CertiStar's MenuStar platform, a restaurant can immediately increase their ticket size with customers. If the restaurant uses the platform, the technology can easily and swiftly identify options in every category, allowing those guests to enjoy appetizers and desserts in addition to their entrée.

With a solution like CertiStar in your service "tool-belt," the venue is also able to turn tables more quickly and serve more guests on any particular day. In our company's research, the average conversation around keeping a food allergy guest safe takes between 8 to 12 minutes and typically includes some combination of the server, manager and or chef. Eliminating that conversation and having it be a confirmation check about the order means less disruption in the kitchen and less time those covers are at the table.

Moving on to the side of risk, CertiStar assists in two key ways. First, the software reduces the overall number of food allergic reactions, which in turn reduces the liability from food allergy related lawsuits. Even lawsuits that are dismissed early in the process can cost you tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees. Second, many people don't realize that food allergies can be provided protections under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The fines and fees can be significant for a restaurant, especially if there are multiple violations. When a customer comes in with food allergies, they must be provided with reasonable accommodations, meaning that they can have the same type of experience as any other guest. It is surprising how frequently staff at restaurants turn away food allergic guests thinking, perhaps, that they're protecting the restaurant from the aforementioned lawsuits.

Using a fact-based, fast and easy tool like CertiStar can help you and your staff reduce both stress and time and make your guest experience even better than it already is, but can also have a real impact on your revenue generation as well as your risk reduction.

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